



Clean Water Plan Advisory Group

Meeting #6 Summary

Background

The King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) has convened the Clean Water Plan Advisory Group to:

- Advise King County on the planning process to identify the most effective water quality investments the region can make.
- Advise King County on the ways to best engage and hear from key interests and constituencies throughout the region, including historically underrepresented groups.
- Provide insights and information related to the pressures, issues, and trends impacting constituencies and businesses throughout the region.
- Assist King County in understanding high-level implications, trade-offs, and opportunities associated with the planning process.

The sixth meeting of the Clean Water Plan Advisory Group took place on June 11, 2020 virtually, through a web-based conference call. Meeting #6 objectives were to:

- Provide an overview of the evaluation framework
- Present and discuss action evaluation categories and criteria
- Provide a regional engagement update and receive feedback on options for future engagement

In advance of the meeting, Advisory Group members were provided a briefing document that contained the following:

- An overview of the two-step approach for the evaluation framework
- A description of the analytical approach for action evaluation
- Initial thinking on assumptions
- An overview of equity implications for action evaluation
- An update on regional engagement

The briefing document also included a set of appendices that provided additional context on these items. This meeting summary provides non-attributed highlights from the presentations and discussions from the June 11, 2020 meeting.

Land Acknowledgement & Opening Remarks

Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) leadership opened the meeting with a welcome and an acknowledgement that, though we met virtually, many participants were calling in while located on the traditional land of Duwamish People and expressed gratitude for Coast Salish People, past and present.

Next, DNRP leadership thanked Advisory Group members for dedicating time to attend the June 11th meeting amidst the public health and social crises. DNRP leadership also acknowledged that the burden of current events is disproportionately borne by black and brown communities, as seen in COVID-19 health outcomes, loss of employment, and police violence. These factors create a heavy burden for these communities and concerns for personal, family, and community safety are carried not only at work but 24 hours a day.

Overview Evaluation Framework

During this first session of the meeting, the County provided an overview of the evaluation framework that will be used to explore the alternative investments the County can make in support of wastewater treatment services and regional water quality improvements, seeking to inform decisions on the best investments for regional water quality. The Clean Water Plan alternative investments exploration process will include two steps: first, an evaluation of potential actions and second, an evaluation of alternative strategies.

Action Evaluation: Analytical Approach

To begin a conversation on the approach being used to evaluate the performance of actions, the County provided an overview of the five categories that have been developed to evaluate the performance of potential actions: water quality; cost; management and operations; community; and sustainability. The County noted that each action will be explored using specific criteria related to each of the five evaluation categories. The analysis will provide both a quantitative understanding of water quality and cost outcomes and a primarily narrative understanding of management and operations, community, and sustainability outcomes for each action.

In response to this overview, individual Advisory Group members made the following observations. Observations have been organized thematically.

Color of Money

- Within the potential actions that will be evaluated, there are actions that may be difficult to fund using sewer ratepayer funds. The restrictions around how funds are used, referred to in the discussion as the “color of money” will require additional care. There is a need to educate the public on use restrictions for different funding sources, even while recognizing that the public cares more about seeing improvements than what source of funding has been used.
- A second aspect of the “color of money” is the variety of revenue sources that play a role in supporting water quality in the region. The County should note as part of its analysis when resources beyond its own could be available to support water quality improvements related to the actions.
- The “color of money” discussion emphasizes the need for partnerships among the constituent agencies and the County.

Affordability

- It is important to continually consider affordability and impacts to people in specific geographies, such as the south end of the service area including in communities such as Renton,

Georgetown, and White Center, when considering improvements. Many low-income communities are struggling, as evidenced by the protests currently happening around the world, and cost must be reasonable. Higher utility bills will be a burden, and improvements should be made to provide a good long-term fit.

- Affordability is both about ensuring that water and wastewater services are affordable, and that proper utility system maintenance is conducted regularly to avoid infrastructure failures, which are also costly.
- An important component of the affordability discussion is the existing rate structure. The rate structure drives investment, and it also impacts low-income ratepayers. Affordability should not only be thought of as a barrier to decision-making; it should also be a two-way conversation that discusses equitable rate structures.
- Affordability is an important component of this conversation and it illuminates limitations to the existing rate structure.
- There is a challenge to effectively address affordability when the size of the investments needed are likely to be very large. The team will be faced with the challenge of ensuring affordability even when the costs are very high.
- Avoided costs should also be considered. Recognizing that making decisions earlier on might avoid issues in the future.

Regional Impact: Beyond County Service Area

- There will be a need to consider impacts of Clean Water Plan actions to geographies outside of WTD service area. Some very concrete examples include salmon and orca, which do not reside only within the County service area. However, there are other important impacts to non-rate paying communities, such as those impacted by past sewage spills. The County will need to grapple with these impacts and should expand public confidence considerations to communities outside of WTD's service area to reflect the high-profile role WTD plays on a regional and statewide basis.
- Given the regional nature of water quality investments, the County should look to make transparent decisions about why something is being done. This transparent evaluation will allow others in the region to understand clearly why decisions were made.

Public Health

- In relation to public health, the endpoints included in the water quality evaluation category are more intermediate points rather than true endpoints. True public health endpoints would require an examination of factors affecting human health, such as disease organisms transmitted through water. However, that is an expensive and complex process, and the criteria included in the evaluation, such as fecal coliform, are reasonable substitutes.
- An important impact to human health is the contamination of drinking water sources due to failure of onsite septic systems. This aspect of human health should be evaluated as part of this process.

Readiness to Proceed:

- The County should consider "readiness to proceed" at either the action or strategy level. Readiness to proceed should be paired with an understanding of the degree to which the action or strategy addresses a County liability vs. the liability of another actor to provide a more comprehensive understanding of each action or strategy.

The County shared the following perspectives in response to these observations:

- The County recognizes that while funding may have restrictions on use, this is not a satisfactory explanation for the public. In our engagements with the public, we have heard a desire to break down silos for more effective action. The County cannot compel anyone outside of our boundaries to action, but we can encourage and support our partners. We recognize that we are one part in a regional effort, and we can both make our specific contribution as well as seek improved collaboration from others.
- The County is seeking to identify evaluation criteria that provide a broader view of impacts, and this is the rationale for including water quality endpoints such as orca and salmon. By evaluating endpoints rather than solely pollutant loads, the County is seeking to incorporate how broad some of these considerations are. The County's Water Quality Benefits Evaluation (WQBE) model looks to incorporate all factors, not just the factors the County has control over, to understand how County actions can help move the needle on specific endpoints. This will help the County assess if actions lead to large improvements or comparatively smaller improvements.
- The County is seeking to make a thoughtful and transparent evaluation so that others in the region can understand County thinking and engage in a conversation about what can be achieved within the context of affordability and other important factors. The County hopes to create an understanding for what the County can implement in terms of future investments and what those investments will deliver to ratepayers and the region as a whole.

Action Evaluation: Equity Implications

In this session, the County provided an overview of their approach to incorporating equity into the evaluation, emphasized that the approach was still being refined, and expressed a desire to receive coaching from Advisory Group membership to refine and strengthen the approach. The Clean Water Plan equity analysis will be informed by the King County [Equity and Social Justice \(ESJ\) Strategic Plan](#). For the Clean Water Plan, WTD has identified six of the fourteen Determinants of Equity that have particularly high affinity relative to the actions under consideration, and these determinants act as a foundation for the ESJ evaluation criteria. The evaluation of ESJ is woven throughout the evaluation categories as narrative descriptions of how the action disproportionately burdens or benefits communities for the equity conditions related to each category – now and in the future, rather than parsed out as its own category. Specifically, equity outcomes will seek to characterize impacts of actions to communities that experience known disparities and have been historically underrepresented in public processes (e.g., communities of color, low-income populations).

In response to this overview, individual Advisory Group members made the following observations. Observations have been organized thematically.

Community Workforce

- In Seattle, the workforce at job sites often do not reflect community diversity. This is an important equity consideration. The County has been an early supporter of community hire with apprenticeships in King County areas that have high levels of disparities. Apprenticeship

programs train previously incarcerated individuals, youth in foster care, and vulnerable populations. These efforts would benefit from additional support.

- There are geographical considerations to workforce equity as well. Many young people in the southern portion of the service area are engaged in work training programs focused on the environment. The County should look to see how the Clean Water plan can provide opportunities for these individuals and their families.

Affordability

- King County is an expensive place to live, and affordability is an important consideration. Building costs, such as hook-up fees, are passed down to the homeowner or renter, and these impacts on affordability should be considered.

Tradeoffs

- It should be noted that short term benefits, such as infrastructure investments, can lead to long term negative impacts, such as gentrification.
- The indirect impact of services can be both positive and negative, and the County should look to maximize community benefits, whether directly or through indirect influence. For example, small businesses may find that investments in stormwater improvements may make their location more attractive, leading to gentrification and displacement. The County should examine the ways in which they can help influence the economic context to protect small businesses.
- The County has approached the incorporation of equity very intentionally into the evaluation and their leadership in this area is appreciated. The tension between investments and gentrification is an area that has not yet been well addressed from a policy perspective. Investments need to be made, but it is important to note and address the fact that communities that have been ratepayers for decades may be vulnerable to displacement due to these investments.
- The tradeoffs discussed at this meeting are part of a larger societal issue: management and cleanup are often socialized while benefits often accrue to private actors. This fact limits our ability to adequately address our challenges. The County has done an impressive job of providing information on the equity approach. The improvements being discussed as part of the Clean Water Plan are necessary to improve the environment, but there is also a need to ensure that improvements do not displace the communities that have dealt with negative consequences for decades to the profit of others.

Other

- The County should clarify the use of the word “impact” intends to refer to both the benefits and burdens of actions.
- The County may consider additional factors, such as transportation, when considering overall barriers to equity.
- It is important to note that when the Advisory Group was first organized, the context was very different, and the recent public health crisis will make the impacts more stark.

Regional Engagement Update

In the final session, the County provided an overview of the activities that have been conducted from Fall 2018 to Spring 2020 to engage communities across the region.

This presentation included a more in-depth discussion of the efforts the County has made to engage historically underrepresented groups. WTD is seeking to advance King County's ESJ mission by investing in community partnerships and compensating organizations for implementing engagement and outreach work for the Clean Water Plan. The County highlighted their partnership with six community-based organizations, the structure of those partnerships, and the objectives of the partnerships.

The County also provided the Advisory Group with an update on engagement related to the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) scoping process. On May 20, 2020, WTD, the lead agency for the Clean Water Plan, issued a Determination of Significance and Request for Comments on the Scope of the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This formally began the SEPA scoping public comment period. As part of this effort, the County launched an online open house to educate the public on how to participate and provided an informational online briefing for Tribal governments.

Finally, the County provided a list of topics under early consideration for additional community outreach in the Fall/Winter of 2020.

During the discussion portion of the Regional Engagement Update, individual Advisory Group members provided the following feedback for the County:

- The County is on the right path with regional engagement, particularly the work done by DNRP leadership to engage via opinion pieces in local news. Increasing public understanding is important, and the County should look to inform the region on the County's role in relation to their partners and the goal of smart stewardship of public resources. The County may also consider additional activities, such as increased engagement with youth groups.
- There are other existing channels that may provide additional community engagement, such as the King County-Cities Climate Collaboration (KC4), other County outreach and community building efforts, youth groups in the region, and the Refugee Federation Service Center.
- The County should consider reaching out to other governments not in the County, such as Kitsap County to be engaged as part of the Clean Water Plan.

In response to an Advisory Group member question on how success will be measured, the County noted that a sign of success will be if the pilot partnerships with community-based organizations is converted into a longstanding, permanent program. The County also noted that as the Clean Water Plan reaches its midway point, there is an effort among regional engagement staff to identify gaps in engagement and focus efforts on engaging parties likely to be impacted by the actions and investments under consideration in the planning process.

Closing Comments

At the end of the meeting, DNRP leadership noted their appreciation for the work the Clean Water Plan team has done throughout the process and the preparation of advanced materials for the Advisory Group. DNRP leadership noted the overall positive feedback received from the Advisory Group is a tribute to the hard work the Clean Water Plan team has done to engage the region. DNRP leadership also thanked the Advisory Group for the thoughtful discussion and noted that the Clean Water Plan will look to discuss the following themes raised by Advisory Group discussions:

- The need to address the “color of money” to make sure the County is meeting public expectations for well-coordinated, quality actions.
- The recommendation to consider “readiness to proceed” as a component of addressing County liabilities.
- The connection between affordability and rate structure, now and in the future.
- The need for partnerships, both within and beyond the County, to make effective water quality investments.
- The recommendation to further refine and understand equity impacts, specifically in regard to affordability and the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens.

Attendees

Advisory Group

NAME	Title	Organization	Attendance 6/16
Monty Anderson	Building Trades Board Member	King County Labor Council/Building Trades	Present
Josh Brown	Executive Director	Puget Sound Regional Council	Present
Caia Caldwell	External Relations Manager	Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties	Present
Adrian Dominguez	Scientific Director	Urban Indian Health Institute	Absent
Dave Gering	Executive Director	Manufacturing Industrial Council	Absent
Jessie Israel	Puget Sound Director	The Nature Conservancy	Absent
Jay Manning	Board Chair; Vice Board Chair	Puget Sound Partnership	Absent
Ben Marre	Drainage & Wastewater Planning and Program Management Division Director	Seattle Public Utilities	Substitute – Leslie Webster
John McClellan	Engineering and Development Director	Alderwood Water and Wastewater	Present
Rachel McCrea	NW Section Manager	Department of Ecology	Present
David Mendoza	Legislative and Government Affairs Director	Front and Centered	Absent
Bud Nicola	Affiliate Professor	University of Washington	Absent
Ben Packard	Executive Director	Earthlab, University of Washington	Present
Mindy Roberts	Puget Sound Program Director	Washington Environmental Council	Present
Heather Sheffer	Environmental Strategy	Boeing	Present
Anne Udaloy	Board Member	League of Women Voters	Present
Ken Workman	Former Council Member	Duwamish Tribe	Present

King County and Clean Water Plan Staff

NAME	TITLE
Christie True	DNRP Director
Mark Isaacson	WTD Division Director
Josh Baldi	Water and Land Resources Division Director
Sonia-Lynn Abenojar	Clean Water Plan Regional Engagement Project Manager
Steve Tolzman	Clean Water Plan Program Manager and Planning Project Manager
Tiffany Knapp	Clean Water Plan Planning Project Manager and Alternate Program Manager
Abby Hook	Environmental Affairs Officer
Joe Hovenkotter	Tribal Government Relations Officer

Ian McKelvey	Brown and Caldwell – Clean Water Plan Consultant
Eunice Lee	Clean Water Plan Regional Engagement Team Member
Allan Kafley	ECOSS – Clean Water Plan Consultant
Susan Kaufman-Una	WTD Project Resources Unit Mgr

Facilitators – Ross Strategic

NAME	TITLE
Rob Greenwood	Principal
Sarah Shadid	Senior Associate